

### [Veterans Today](#)

#### Top 10 Veterans Stories in Today's News

1. **Hearings Focus On Gulf War Illness.** The second item for the Washington Times (8/18, Fales) "Sgt. Shaft" column says US Rep. Harry Mitchell (D-AZ) "recently conducted the third of a series of hearings focused on Gulf War Illness: The final in the series was intended to gauge the outlook going forward for veterans suffering from GWI, specifically examining how" the Department of Veterans Affairs "administers healthcare and benefits" to such vets. After stating that the first two hearings "found...veterans are suffering from acute and chronic symptoms attributed to their military service and experience barriers to care and services" from VA, the Times adds that in 2009, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki "called for a comprehensive review of...VA's approach in meeting the needs of Gulf War Veterans and established a Gulf War Task Force chaired by VA Chief of Staff John Gingrich."
2. **Physicians' Union Leader Pushing For Resignation Of VA Hospital's Medical Director.** In continuing coverage, the AP (8/18) says Joseph Simon, the "leader of a physicians' union," has "called for the resignation" of Linda Watson, who serves as medical director for the G.V. 'Sonny' Montgomery Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi. The AP notes that Simon, who is "president of the National Federation of Federal Employees, Local 589, representing Veterans Affairs physicians who serve in supervisory positions," and "another Local 589 leader sent a July 10 letter" to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, "on behalf of the physicians they represent, saying, 'Physician trust in our current facility leadership's character and competence is now beyond repair.'"
3. **Report Highlights Rising Cost Of Living At Vets Homes In Wisconsin.** On its website, WTMJ-TV Milwaukee, WI (8/17, Trevey) reported, "A report from the Legislative Audit Bureau highlights the rising cost for veterans to live" in Wisconsin veterans homes. In a "statement, the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs defended the increase," stating, "These rate increases were absolutely necessary and overdue, and that we took the difficult step of raising rates in a way that was as protective as possible of our members." The Madison-based Wisconsin State Journal (8/18, Verburg) and the AP (8/18) also cover this story.
4. **VA Requests Open Source Software Proposals For EHR System.** NextGov (8/18, Brewin)

reports, "The Veterans Affairs Department asked industry, government agencies and academic researchers last week for insights on using open source software as a key component of a modernized electronic health record system, a move that could have serious implications for the Obama administration's initiative for adoption of digital medical files nationwide. In a request for information issued" last Wednesday, VA "said it is evaluating the viability of including open source as part of the development of upgrading its decades-old health record system, Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA)."

5. Contract Bid Could Mean Four Days Per Week Of VA Clinic Staffing. The Dalles (OR) Chronicle (8/18, Brenner) reports, "The Dalles federal Veterans Administration clinic could be staffed up to four days per week if any physicians bid on a six-month contract job now posted, a VA spokesman said Monday. 'When someone gets here, it will be someone of high quality,' Chuck Ritter of the Portland VA hospital told about 35 veterans" during a meeting held "at The Dalles Civic Auditorium. Ritter said VA officials hope to have a full team - including a physician or nurse-practitioner, a registered nurse and a licensed practical nurse - on board as soon as possible."

6. Appeals Court Rules That Stolen Valor Act Is Unconstitutional. The AP (8/18) reports, "A three-year-old federal law that makes it a crime to falsely claim to have received a medal from the US military is unconstitutional, an appeals court panel in California ruled Tuesday." After noting that the "decision involves the case of Xavier Alvarez of Pomona, Calif., a water district board member who said at a public meeting in 2007 that he was a retired Marine who received the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military decoration," the AP continues, "A panel of the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals sided" with Alvarez in a "2-1 decision Tuesday, agreeing that the law was a violation of his free-speech rights" and that because there is no evidence lies such as those told by Alvarez harm anyone, there is no compelling reason for those kinds of lies to be banned by the government. The AP adds, "The US Attorney's Office in Los Angeles said it was deciding whether to appeal Tuesday's ruling." The San Jose (CA) Mercury News (8/18, Blackstock) and the "Under the Radar" blog for Politico (8/18) run similar stories.

7. National Cemeteries In Arkansas To Receive Stimulus Funds. The AP (8/17) reports, "Members of Arkansas' congressional delegation say three national cemeteries in Arkansas are to get \$2.2 million in federal money, with the bulk of the funds - more than \$2 million - going to refurbishing efforts at the veterans' cemetery in Fort Smith." On Monday, a release from the delegation "said the Fort Smith National Cemetery is to receive \$2,069,611 to raise and realign headstones and to repair about 12,000 gravesites, plus \$2,212 for purchase of mowing equipment. The Fayetteville National Cemetery is to get \$92,829 for resealing roads, \$16,415 to paint buildings, and \$18,626 to buy mowing equipment," while Little Rock National Cemetery "will use \$36,250 of its funds to renovate" a Civil War monument, "plus \$18,750 for repainting buildings."

On its website, KHBS-TV Ft. Smith, AR (8/17) reported, "Area national cemeteries were given more than \$2.2M in federal funding, the bulk going to repair gravesites at the Fort Smith National Cemetery," which received \$2,254,693 in "Recovery Act funding...awarded" by the US Department of Veterans Affairs. KHBS added that when Suzanne Dalton, a veteran's widow who was happy to hear about the stimulus money, commented on Fort Smith, she "said the cemetery is well maintained and a beautiful tribute to service men and women."

8. VA Studying Link Between Concussions, ALS. The AP (8/18) notes that Dr. Ann McKee, "director of neuropathology for the Department of Veterans Affairs at the Bedford VA Medical Center," and other scientists "funded in part" by the National Football League, "say they have found evidence connecting head injuries in athletes to a condition that mimics Lou Gehrig's disease." After noting that McKee "said she found toxic proteins in the spinal cords of three athletes who had suffered head injuries and were later diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, or ALS," the AP adds, "Those same proteins have been found in the brains of athletes with chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a disease linked to head injuries that causes cognitive decline, abnormal behavior and dementia. The findings, announced Tuesday, are to be published in September's issue of the Journal of Neuropathology and Experimental Neurology," a point also made by "Two-Way" blog for NPR (8/18, James) and the "White Coat Notes" blog for the Boston Globe (8/18, Lazar).

The New York Times (8/18, B12, Schwarz) points out that researchers at the VA hospital "in Bedford, Mass., and the Boston University School of Medicine said the link between head trauma and symptoms that resemble amyotrophic lateral sclerosis may explain why" the disease, known as ALS, has been diagnosed in military veterans at high rates. After stating the "doctors said that the link between head trauma and an ALS-like disease suggests that the heightened risk would apply not just to collision-sport athletes, but soldiers who sustain concussions and blast injuries," the Times says, "Several studies have identified members of the United States military - particularly combat soldiers - at heightened risk for ALS, which is considered related to service in the determination of veterans' benefits."

CNN (8/18, Smith) reports, "More than 70 years" after pro baseball player Lou Gehrig announced that he had ALS, a "new, small study in the Journal of Neuropathology and Experimental Neurology may have unlocked a tantalizing clue about" the "illness - one that could be connected to his history of concussions." Dr. Ann McKee, "along with colleagues at the Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy at the Boston University School of Medicine, discovered an abnormal protein" called TDP-43 in the "brain and spinal cord of two former professional football players - both diagnosed with ALS before they died - and a former boxer. All of them had a history of repeated head trauma."

According to a front page story in the New York Times (8/18, A1, Schwarz), a "peer-reviewed paper to be published Wednesday in a leading journal of neuropathology...suggests that the demise of athletes like Gehrig and soldiers given a diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, might have been catalyzed by injuries only now becoming understood: concussions and other brain trauma." In interviews, authors of the paper "acknowledged the clear implication: Lou Gehrig might not have had Lou Gehrig's disease." The Times adds, "The finding could prompt a redirection in the study of motor degeneration in athletes and military veterans being given diagnoses of ALS at rates considerably higher than

normal, said several experts in ALS who had seen early versions of the paper."

UPI (8/18) also covers this story, as does the Boston Globe (8/18, A1, Lazar), which says in a front page article that the study in the Journal of Neuropathology and Experimental Neurology is "not the first to link head traumas and ALS-type illness," because a "study of former professional soccer players in Italy found they were 6.5 times more likely to have ALS than the general population. An increased" ALS "incidence has also been reported among football players in this country. And among veterans with a history of head injuries, the risk of ALS has been pegged at 2.3 times higher than normal, prompting the US Department of Veterans Affairs in 2008 to begin compensating the vets and their survivors for the disease."

9. Cardin Asks DOD To Devise Fort Detrick Contamination Remedy Plan By December. In continuing coverage, the Frederick (MD) News-Post (8/17, Gardner) noted that on Monday, US Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD) "sent a letter to the Department of Defense...asking the agency to look into contamination at Fort Detrick and devise a plan by Dec. 1 to remedy the situation." Some "residents who live near Fort Detrick fear that Agent Orange and other chemicals are leaching into the ground, contaminating local wells and water supplies."

10. Vet Center's Opening To Be Celebrated. The "Mesquite" blog for the Dallas Morning News (8/18, Leszcynski) notes that on Wednesday, the "Dallas County Vet Center will open doors officially at 502 W. Kearney St., suite 300, in Mesquite. A grand opening celebration will begin at 10 a.m.," at the "Mesquite Arts Center, 1527 N. Galloway Ave., and finish at the Vet Center." The Morning News adds, "There are 271 Vet Centers nationwide with three others in North Texas - in Dallas, Fort Worth and a new facility in Arlington."